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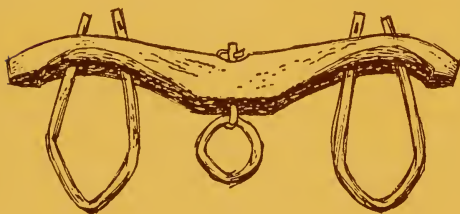
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Gow, Ronald

The Lawyer of Springfield

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The Lawyer of Springfield

A Play in One Act

by
Ronald Gow

Price, 40 Cents



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WALTER H. BAKER COMPANY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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BAKER'S PLAYS

BOSTON 11, MASSACHUSETTS

Printed in the United States of America

The Lawyer of Springfield

A Play in One Act

By

RONALD GOW

*Author of "Grannie's A Hundred," "Henry, Or the
House On the Moor," and "Under the
Skull and Bones."*



BAKER'S PLAYS

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The substance of this play is well documented—authentic. Abraham Lincoln, young lawyer of Springfield, Illinois, without thought of remuneration frustrates the attempts to ruin the fortunes of a family of touring players,—the Jeffersons. Among these good troupers we see Joseph, Junior, who was to bring fame to the American stage, barnstorming with his parents. They are investing all of their resources in building, for their use, a wooden structure, suitable for play-giving in the town which had only lately been made the state capital. Some citizens of the theatre-less Springfield welcome the project. But a rich and influential anti-theatre faction are indignant. “Ours is a God-fearing community,” they declare. A theatre is branded “a devil’s workshop.” As the structure nears completion, the town council enacts a new law compelling such “unholy” enterprises to pay a stiff fee to secure a license. The fee in this instance is made intentionally exorbitant. The Jeffersons, unable to meet it, face ruin. Into the disheartened group a stranger, tall, dark-haired, enters. “I am here,” he says, “because I heard you are in trouble. I think you are up against rank injustice. I am a lawyer. I live here in Springfield. Lincoln is my name—Abraham Lincoln.” With the appearance of a delegation from the council advising the Jeffersons “to get out of town quick” if the theatre is opened without payment of the license fee, Lincoln shows what a good lawyer he is.

The Lawyer of Springfield

CHARACTERS

McKENZIE

MRS. JEFFERSON

JOSEPH JEFFERSON, JUNIOR

JOSEPH JEFFERSON, SENIOR

THE MAN

THREE TOWN COUNCILLORS

SCENE: *Springfield, Illinois.*


TIME: 1839.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Joseph Jefferson has arrived at Springfield on a theatrical tour, and meaning to stay in the town for some time, has used all his money in building a rough wooden theatre on some waste land.

The action of the play takes place around the front entrance of the theatre. This might be very simply represented by a gap in the curtains at the back in the centre, the doorway being suggested by rough planks or laths nailed together. It would be an advantage to have a small platform or rostrum to form a doorstep, but this is not essential. (A more ambitious treatment of this setting can be achieved by making a "set-piece" of the porch and rostrum, with pillars supporting a canopy—suggesting a classical portico in rough material. A cut-cloth could be substituted for the curtains, or the front wall of the theatre could be built solidly with flats.) For production in the open air, or for stages without a curtain, it will be easy for the characters to make their entrance at the beginning of the play. The positions given in the text refer to the actors' right and left.



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<http://archive.org/details/lawyerofspringfi00gowr>

The Lawyer of Springfield

SCENE.—*When the curtain rises MCKENZIE is standing on a box hammering up a notice over the doorway of the theatre. It states, in old American lettering, that this is the "SPRINGFIELD THEATER ROYAL—Proprietors, J. Jefferson and G. McKenzie." (It would be authentic to have a poster telling us about the drama entitled "Clari, the Maid of Milan," in which MRS. JEFFERSON sings a new song—"Home, Sweet Home.") MRS. JEFFERSON is downstage L., dealing with costumes and properties in the trunk, and some washing hanging on a line. Her son is kneeling on the right, among boxes, planks, and pieces of scenery, filling some lamps with oil.*

MRS. JEFFERSON. Oh, Mr. McKenzie! For goodness' sake . . . !

(MCKENZIE stops hammering and turns.)

MCKENZIE. Yes, ma'am? What is it?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Just you take a look at that! The rats have been at Romeo's legs again.

MCKENZIE. That's too bad.

MRS. JEFFERSON. (*Turning over costumes*) The mending I got to do this week! These costumes have never been the same since they fell in the Mississippi.

MCKENZIE. (*Pointing to notice*) What do you think of that?

MRS. JEFFERSON. (*Reading*) "Springfield The-atre Royal." . . . My! Isn't that swell!

MCKENZIE. Ain't never had a theatre in Springfield before. I reckon the town ought to be mighty proud of it.

MRS. JEFFERSON. I think it's a credit to you, Mr. McKenzie. It certainly is.

MCKENZIE. (*Climbing down from the box*) Thank you, Mrs. Jefferson. It's been the toughest week I ever had in my life. (*He mops his brow.*) Did you get the oil for them lamps, sonny?

JOSEPH. (*A boy of ten*) Yes, Mr. McKenzie, I got it.

MCKENZIE. Fine! Only don't go splashing it around. It costs money.

(*A row of oil-lamps are attached to a board. JOSEPH attends to them. MRS. JEFFERSON has taken a Roman helmet from the trunk.*)

MRS. JEFFERSON. If Joseph aims to do "Julius Caesar" someone's got to fix this helmet.

MCKENZIE. Guess you'd better let me take care of that. I heard a queer story about helmets last night too. Down in the saloon. Made me laugh.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Would you mind sitting here a minute, Mr. McKenzie?

MCKENZIE. Eh? Oh, sure . . .

(*He sits on the side of the trunk with his back to her, knowing what she wants him for.*)

MRS. JEFFERSON. It's just my wig for tonight. It ain't fit to be seen.

(*She puts a female wig on MCKENZIE, with long cork-screw curls, and proceeds to use a comb on it.*)

MCKENZIE. That's O.K. You just go ahead.

MRS. JEFFERSON. What were you saying, Mr. McKenzie?

JOSEPH. Something about helmets.

MCKENZIE. (*Who is quite oblivious of the curls*) Oh, yes. Well, it seems there was a company of actors went out west and they got lost some place over in Iowa. Guess it must have been one of old Reub's outfits. Well, everybody told 'em not to go, because of Indians, you understand; but they wouldn't listen. They just laughed and took no notice. Well, nobody heard nothing more of them

after that, or what happened, or where they got to, not till six months later. Then a fellow who'd been out there prospecting saw some Indians, and do you know what them Indians was wearing?

MRS. JEFFERSON. No.

McKENZIE. Roman helmets! Yes, ma'am. Just like this one. And that wasn't all. Them blessed Indians had stolen the actors' wigs and was wearing 'em for scalps.

MRS. JEFFERSON. And what happened to the actors?

McKENZIE. Never seen again, ma'am.

MRS. JEFFERSON. For heaven's sake!

McKENZIE. It's true.

JOSEPH. Gee! I'd like to meet Indians.

McKENZIE. Not that sort, you wouldn't, sonny. Not unless you got a gun. Here, you, take this helmet to Ted. He's 'round on the stage. Tell him to get it fixed.

(JOSEPH takes the helmet and goes 'round the back of the theatre—i.e., he goes out by the exit upstage on the R. MRS. JEFFERSON takes off the wig.)

MRS. JEFFERSON. Thank you, Mr. McKenzie. That's been a real help.

McKENZIE. You're welcome, ma'am. (*Rubbing his hands.*) Well, now we're going to make some money. We've got our own theatre and not a seat left for tonight. Say, are we having a rehearsal?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Joseph said we needed one. Isn't he a long time?

McKENZIE. (*Looking at his watch*) Yeh, he said he'd be back before this.

MRS. JEFFERSON. I hope nothing is wrong.

McKENZIE. No. Maybe he's having to stand a few drinks. He had to see the town council about permission to open the theatre, and town councillors are surprising thirsty when you want something in a hurry.

MRS. JEFFERSON. We never had difficulty before.

McKENZIE. No, it's just a formality. There's a minister in this town preached a sermon against us, and that's caused a bit of trouble.

MRS. JEFFERSON. What did he want to preach against us for? We've done no harm.

McKENZIE. It wasn't against us in particular. He meant all actors and actresses. Said it was an unholy calling and that we were missionaries of the devil.

MRS. JEFFERSON. My!

McKENZIE. I reckon it'll do us a lot of good.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Will it?

McKENZIE. Sure! People will pay a lot of money to see missionaries of the devil.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Mr. McKenzie . . . you don't think, do you, that they'd stop us opening?

McKENZIE. No, they wouldn't dare. I sold six seats this morning to a member of the council. When they've seen you tonight they'll all be singing "Home, Sweet Home" tomorrow. Nice, uplifting sentiment. It'll be better than a hundred parson's sermons. You mark my words. We're going to stay in Springfield, Illinois, for a long, long time.

(The boy JOSEPH calls, and then appears upstage R., pointing off in the direction from which he has come.)

JOSEPH. *(Calling)* Mr. McKenzie . . .

McKENZIE. Hullo?

JOSEPH. *(Entering)* Here's dad coming now.

(McKENZIE stands on the doorstep to get a better view.)

McKENZIE. Yes, here he is, Mrs. Jefferson.

(She follows upstage.)

MRS. JEFFERSON. Doesn't look happy, does he?

McKENZIE. He certainly has a long face. *(He calls.)* Everything all right, Jefferson?

MRS. JEFFERSON. *(Calling)* Did you get it, Joseph?

JOSEPH. Dad's shaking his head.

(They wait a moment in silence until JOSEPH JEFFERSON,

SENIOR, *enters and stands looking at them. He is an actor, and even in his difficulty he savors the value of an entrance, his hands clasped behind him, head forward, one eyebrow cocked up. Then he paces down R. and stands with his back to them.*)

MRS. JEFFERSON. Joseph!

McKENZIE. Something wrong, old boy?

JEFFERSON. Wrong? Yes, something is wrong! Something rotten in the state of Denmark. . . . I have been insulted!

McKENZIE. Never mind that. Did you get the license?

JEFFERSON. No.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Joseph, my darling!

(She runs to him and they embrace.)

McKENZIE. What's the trouble?

JEFFERSON. Ruin and despair, McKenzie! Ruin and despair!

McKENZIE. All right, old boy! But just stop acting, and sit down, and tell us all about it.

JEFFERSON. I am not acting. This is a catastrophe!

MRS. JEFFERSON. You've no right to say that, Mr. McKenzie. Joseph isn't acting, are you, dear? Can't you see he's trembling? Sit down, my angel.

(She guides him to the trunk.)

McKENZIE. All I'm asking is an explanation. If we can't open we'd best get out of town darned quick with all them tickets sold.

(As he speaks he finds a bottle inside the theatre doorway and pours a drink into a tin mug which he takes to JEFFERSON.)

JEFFERSON. *(Holding up his hand)* See that, my dear. Trembling with baffled rage. Had I been a younger man . . .

MCKENZIE. (*Handing the mug*) All right. You try some of that.

JEFFERSON. Eh, what's this?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Drink it. You'll feel better.

(JEFFERSON *drinks*. MCKENZIE *calls* JOSEPH, JUNIOR.)

MCKENZIE. You run along and tell the company there ain't going to be no rehearsal this morning. And not a word about anything else. See?

JOSEPH. Yes, Mr. McKenzie. I see.

(JOSEPH *runs out*.)

MRS. JEFFERSON. (*Taking the cup*) There now. Feeling better?

JEFFERSON. Yes. I'll get even with those carrion.

MCKENZIE. That's the spirit! Now, tell us what happened.

JEFFERSON. I'll tell you. Some righteous gentlemen in this town have persuaded the council to pass a new law against actors.

MCKENZIE. When?

JEFFERSON. This morning. When I appeared before the council they were all ready for me.

MCKENZIE. They can't do that.

JEFFERSON. Can't they? They have done! They want us to pay five hundred dollars before we open the theatre.

MRS. JEFFERSON. We haven't got it!

MCKENZIE. What do they want five hundred for?

JEFFERSON. As a guarantee of good behavior.

MCKENZIE. We'll be ruined, Jefferson!

JEFFERSON. That's what I told them. I asked them to come and look at the theatre for themselves.

MCKENZIE. Did you tell them it was an acquisition to the town?

JEFFERSON. Yes. They laughed. I told them all our money was invested in it. They laughed again. I asked

for time to pay this money. They laughed uncontrollably. Tell me—do I, Joseph Jefferson, look like a comedian?

MRS. JEFFERSON. No, my dear. You're a tragedian.

JEFFERSON. Then why did they laugh?

MCKENZIE. Guess you ought to have sent me. I'd have called 'em skunks.

JEFFERSON. They're sending a committee to look at the theatre. I've an idea they mean to seize it if we don't pay.

MCKENZIE. Huh! They'll have to seize me first.

MRS. JEFFERSON. When are they coming?

JEFFERSON. This morning.

MCKENZIE. They can't do it. Jefferson, we're going to fight this. Did you see a lawyer?

JEFFERSON. How could we pay a lawyer?

MCKENZIE. Offer him a percentage.

JEFFERSON. Lawyers don't work that way.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Give him some of the ticket money.

JEFFERSON. Too risky. If we don't open and we can't pay the money back they'll smash the theatre.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Maybe they don't know what a high-class company we are.

MCKENZIE. Did you tell 'em we played "Hamlet"?

JEFFERSON. Yes. They had never heard of it.

(JOSEPH *appears.*)

JOSEPH. Say, dad, there's a man 'round here says he wants to speak to you.

MCKENZIE. This'll be them.

JEFFERSON. What's his name?

JOSEPH. He wouldn't give his name.

JEFFERSON. Ask him to step this way.

(JOSEPH *goes.*)

MCKENZIE. If this is that blue-nosed parson that preached the sermon—I'll preach him!

(*He goes up to the entrance R.*)

JEFFERSON. (*Putting his arm around his wife, who is tearful*) My dear, I'm sorry. Don't cry, please. . . .

MRS. JEFFERSON. Oh, why have they done this to us? It's everything to us—and all the things we'd planned. . . .

JEFFERSON. I know, my dear. . . .

MRS. JEFFERSON. Why have they done it?

JEFFERSON. I argued with them. They wouldn't listen.

(McKENZIE returns as JOSEPH enters with the man, who is tall, raw-boned, clean-shaven and ugly.)

JOSEPH. Here he is.

THE MAN. Good morning. (*They do not answer. He looks from one to the other.*) Pardon my intruding here—which of you is the manager?

JEFFERSON. I am. Joseph Jefferson. This is my wife. This is Mr. McKenzie, my partner.

McKENZIE. (*Truculent*) Just a minute. Are you the holy man that preached a sermon?

THE MAN. No, sir. I'm not.

JEFFERSON. You're not one of the council, are you?

THE MAN. No. I haven't that honor.

McKENZIE. Then who are you?

THE MAN. I am a lawyer.

McKENZIE. Oh, I see. I guess you heard we were in trouble and you came 'round to make a bit of money.

JEFFERSON. Silence, McKenzie! (*To the MAN.*) You wanted to see me, I think.

THE MAN. Yes, sir. I certainly came because I heard you were in trouble. But it is not true that I came for money.

McKENZIE. Strangest lawyer I ever met.

THE MAN. Maybe. I live here in Springfield, and I came to see if I could help you. I've heard what the council are trying to do to you, gentlemen, and I tell you frankly, I'm ashamed of my fellow citizens.

JEFFERSON. Oh, well, thank you, sir. That's fair enough. But I'm afraid you can do very little—unless you can get them to alter the law.

THE MAN. I understand some members of the council are on their way to see you.

JEFFERSON. Yes, they want five hundred dollars and I'm afraid we haven't got it.

THE MAN. I have a fair knowledge of the law.

McKENZIE. That's not much help.

THE MAN. I have also studied human nature. Perhaps that might help us more.

JEFFERSON. I'll be glad of anything you can do, Mr.—er—I didn't get your name. . . .

THE MAN. Lincoln is the name. Abraham Lincoln. I'll be frank with you. I don't expect you to pay me, but I don't guarantee to save your theatre. I'm only young as lawyers go—what you might call an apprentice. I may lose the case for you. I can make as many blunders as any other darn fool. But I'll do my best for you, and that's all any man can promise.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Thank you, Mr. Lincoln. I know you'll do your best. Do you think there's some hope?

LINCOLN. We'll just have to see, ma'am.

JEFFERSON. I accept your offer, Mr. Lincoln. Things can't get worse anyway.

McKENZIE. (*Shaking hands*) My money's on you, sir. I don't know the legal expression for skunk, but if you do I'll be glad to have you use it in connection with these gentlemen. . . . (*Voices are heard.*) And by Jiminy, they're coming now! You speak to 'em, Jefferson. I don't trust myself.

(McKENZIE goes over to the L. MRS. JEFFERSON is by the trunk. JEFFERSON remains C. LINCOLN goes up to the doorstep of the theatre. JOSEPH enters with the men and crosses over to his mother. The three councillors occupy the R. of the stage as they enter and stand surveying the theatre.)

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Well, here we are. . . .

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Yes. This is the place.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Hello, Mister Jefferson! We've come to see your theatre. Have you raised that money yet?

JEFFERSON. No, sir. I haven't.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Well, that's too bad.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. (*Reading*) "The-atre Royal"? Royal, eh? Say, that don't sound American to me.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Let me give you a word of advice, Mr. Jefferson. Best thing you can do is to get out of town quick. If you open this theatre we'll come after you. And if you don't open the theatre the ticket-holders'll come after you. See?

SECOND COUNCILLOR. I reckon you're sitting over a barrel, Jefferson.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. Yeah—and what's more we don't like you.

JEFFERSON. Am I to understand that your council are going to run me out of town?

FIRST COUNCILLOR. The council have left the decision to me and my colleagues here.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. We are the theatre sub-committee.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. Yeah—and we don't like theatres.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. And we don't think you've got a leg to stand on, Jefferson.

(McKENZIE *begins to move toward c., boiling.*)

McKENZIE. Here, wait a minute, wait a minute! Let me have a word with these god-forsaken sons of skunks. . . .

JEFFERSON. Silence, McKenzie!

McKENZIE. It's time somebody said it.

JEFFERSON. Will you keep quiet!

(MRS. JEFFERSON *takes his arm and puts him back on the L., where he goes muttering.*)

McKENZIE. All I said was skunks. . . .

MRS. JEFFERSON. Please be quiet, Mr. McKenzie.

LINCOLN. So you have full power to decide in this matter?

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Yes, sir.

LINCOLN. Although whatever you decide there is nothing to prevent Jefferson taking the matter before the legislature.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. What do you mean?

LINCOLN. That is his right as an American citizen.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Who might you be?

LINCOLN. My name is Lincoln. I'm a lawyer in this town.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. I know him. Once seen, never forgotten.

LINCOLN. Mr. Jefferson has entrusted me with his case.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Ah? So he has got some money after all?

LINCOLN. I don't think so. You must remember it is in my client's power to appeal against your decision—even if he be a pauper. So perhaps, gentlemen, I may be able to prevent you making fools of yourselves.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. Another thing we don't like is lawyers.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Listen, Mr. What's-your-name, this is a lot of nonsense. We got a perfectly clear case. Springfield Town Law, Number 1743.

LINCOLN. I know. A law passed by the council this morning in deference to a certain strong element in the town. Supposing we sit down, gentlemen, and talk it over.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. I don't like talking things over.

LINCOLN. I ask you to listen to my client's case. That may take some time. (*To Mrs. JEFFERSON.*) Will you be seated, ma'am? (*Mrs. JEFFERSON sits on the trunk, with JOSEPH beside her, and JEFFERSON behind.*) There, I think we'll all be better sitting down. You might find seats on those boxes, gentlemen. The law is inclined to be long-winded. That's better.

(*They sit down.*)

FIRST COUNCILLOR. (*Muttering as he sits*) We didn't come here for a public meeting.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Guess we've got to hear the evidence.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. I don't like evidence.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. O.K., Mister Lawyer. What you got to say?

(*LINCOLN stands on the step of the theatre, framed by the portico.*)

LINCOLN. Gentlemen of the Springfield Council, I don't have to tell you that the honor of this town is in your hands. You have an important decision to make, and because you have been chosen to make that decision, we know you for men of intelligence, integrity and good will. This decision may be more important than you think. Here we are on a plot of waste land on the outskirts of Springfield, Illinois. We are discussing this wooden shack. . . .

McKENZIE. (*Interrupting hotly*) What do you mean—a wooden shack? That's a theatre!

JEFFERSON. Don't interrupt!

LINCOLN. My clients just poor strolling players—rogues and vagabonds. . . .

JEFFERSON. What? Mr. Lincoln, I protest!

LINCOLN. Don't interrupt, Mr. Jefferson.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Be quiet, both of you.

LINCOLN. No. You are deciding more than the fate of this shack and these players. You are deciding one of those things that are small in themselves, but which taken all together add up to a total that we call the progress of humanity. Maybe you think humanity has progressed far enough in Springfield, Illinois. Maybe you think you can do without a theatre, and actors, and the drama, in this town of yours. But I think you are wrong. Why? Because this question was decided for you two thousand years ago in the land of Greece. In that land there lived a religious people, and a democratic people, and a great people—and out of their religion and their democracy and their greatness sprang the drama as we know it today. My client here, Mr. Jefferson, is a true son of that same Thespis, who, we are told—by tradition and by ancient writings—was the first actor, dedicated to the glory of his country's gods.

(McKENZIE *applauds.*)

FIRST COUNCILLOR. That's all very well. But where's all this leading us to?

LINCOLN. That is a wise question. I see you are a logical man. It leads us to this. That I demand this

theatre be given permission to open on *religious* grounds.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. But we've been asked to keep it closed on religious grounds.

LINCOLN. I know. That's the mistake. And when you've closed it, and when I take this case before the Supreme Court of Illinois—as I certainly mean to do, gentlemen, if you decide against my client—I shall tell them of Thespis and his cart, and how he traveled in the valleys of his native Attica, and how a great religious drama arose from those simple beginnings. I shall tell them how, in the Middle Ages, the Church—yes, gentlemen, the Church itself—used the stage to instruct the people. I shall tell them that no nation which sought to suppress the theatre has ever been truly great or religious or democratic. But I need not tell *you* these things, gentlemen, because you are scholars and you know them.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Yes, that's true.

LINCOLN. You remember, sir, what Shakespeare says in "Hamlet."

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Me? Yes—oh, yes! Sure I remember.

LINCOLN. What does he say?

(LINCOLN *pauses rhetorically for a reply. The SECOND COUNCILLOR looks uncomfortable.*)

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Well . . . what d'y'want to pitch on me for?

LINCOLN. He says that players should be well used. He says: "They are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better to have had a bad epitaph than their ill report while you lived." That's what William Shakespeare said.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. What have quotations got to do with it?

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Kind of makes it more respectable.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. I don't like it.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. I guess Shakespeare wasn't a Springfield man.

LINCOLN. No.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Then what you just said ain't evidence.

LINCOLN. No. But it will probably impress the Supreme Court.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Quotation sustained. Go on, Mr. Lincoln.

LINCOLN. These good people promise to play "Hamlet" for us. You ought to see it. Just chock full of quotations. Very useful for a town councillor.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. (*Unconverted*) I want to ask a question.

LINCOLN. Certainly.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. The Reverend McGinty said in his sermon that these here actors were missionaries of the devil. What do you say to that?

LINCOLN. Well, maybe the Reverend McGinty knows more about the devil than I do. But I think he's mistaken. Besides Old Nick's got too much to do over in Ohio to worry himself about Illinois.

(*The COUNCILLORS enjoy this.*)

SECOND COUNCILLOR. That's true. That's one against Ohio.

LINCOLN. Any more questions?

FIRST COUNCILLOR. As chairman of the theatre subcommittee I vote for giving them a trial. What do you say?

SECOND COUNCILLOR. They've got to behave themselves.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. That's so. Remember—it's only a trial. Any increase in devilment in this town and out they go. What do you say, Green?

THIRD COUNCILLOR. I don't like it.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Aw, he never likes anything on principle. Take no notice.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. All right, then. We give permission.

LINCOLN. And you waive your right to a guarantee?

FIRST COUNCILLOR. As they haven't got it I guess we might as well.

McKENZIE. Hear that, Jefferson!

JEFFERSON. I thank you, gentlemen.

MRS. JEFFERSON. Oh, I'm so glad!

(McKENZIE *shakes hands with* JEFFERSON, *laughing excitedly.*)

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Well, Mr. Lawyer, that was a very pretty little speech. We might have you on the Town Council yourself one of these days.

LINCOLN. Thank you. They tell me the standard of oratory is very high.

SECOND COUNCILLOR. Yes, sir. We have one man who can speak for two hours and thirty-seven minutes without stopping for breath. Yes, sir!

LINCOLN. That's amazing. I thank you for your decision, gentlemen. That means my client is free to open his theatre tonight.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. It does.

JEFFERSON. Thank you very much.

THIRD COUNCILLOR. And don't forget—we've got our eye on you.

JEFFERSON. We shall welcome it, sir.

FIRST COUNCILLOR. Well, good day, all. Good day, ma'am.

LINCOLN. Good day, gentlemen.

(*The COUNCILLORS depart. McKENZIE bounds up to LINCOLN.*)

McKENZIE. Yippee! Here, give me your hand! I'm proud to know you, Mr. Lawyer, real proud. Say, was all that true—what you said?

LINCOLN. I believe so.

McKENZIE. About the theatre, and the Greeks, and religion, and all that?

LINCOLN. Yes, that was true.

McKENZIE. Gee! I never knew I was religious before.

JEFFERSON. Mr. Lincoln, I don't know how I can thank you sufficiently. We're very grateful.

McKENZIE. Sure!

MRS. JEFFERSON. It was a beautiful speech, Mr. Lincoln. I thank you very much.

LINCOLN. It has been a pleasure, ma'am.

McKENZIE. And if we make money we're going to pay you.

JEFFERSON. Most certainly.

LINCOLN. That won't be necessary.

McKENZIE. Listen! I got a proposition. Jefferson, what do you think? We'll put him in the show! Mr. Lincoln as Hamlet. Special performance with local actor.

JEFFERSON. (*Laughing*) Well, if Mr. Lincoln is agreeable. . . .

McKENZIE. Listen, Lincoln, old boy, it's the chance of a lifetime. It might be the turning point in your career. How'd you like to go on the stage and be an actor?

LINCOLN. You think I could play Hamlet?

McKENZIE. Think? The part was written for you! Look at his face. Did you ever see anything so gosh-darn ugly in your life?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Don't be rude, Mr. McKenzie!

McKENZIE. I wasn't being rude. That was a compliment. Hamlet's got to look ugly—like Jefferson. What do you say, Mr. Lincoln?

LINCOLN. I'm very flattered. Inside five minutes I've been told I'd do well on the town council and on the stage.

McKENZIE. Well?

LINCOLN. No. I must refuse. I may be wrong, but—I believe I have other things to do. Thank you, all the same.

McKENZIE. O.K. If you change your mind just let us know. Say, we've got to get that rehearsal going. I'll call the company, Jefferson, and let you know. So long, Mr. Lincoln! Gee! To think I was religious all the time and never knew it!

(McKENZIE goes into the theatre. JOSEPH has returned to the filling of the lamps, down R. LINCOLN remains C., with MRS. JEFFERSON to his L. and JEFFERSON to his R.)

JEFFERSON. We shall always be happy to give you complimentary tickets, sir.

LINCOLN. Thank you. This is all very interesting to me. I guess that's scenery. What might all those lamps be for? On that board?

JEFFERSON. We call those floats. See. (*He and JOSEPH raise the board.*) These are the footlights. This board is counterweighted. When we want to darken the stage all the lamps sink out of sight—like this. If we want more light we raise the board, and so it goes up and down. That's why we call them floats.

LINCOLN. I understand. Maybe I'd better not see any more of your machinery. There's a fascination about the theatre, a kind of mystery, and knowing too much about the inner workings might destroy it for me. Do you know, there's a dream I have, sometimes, about a theatre . . . and I'm sitting in one of those boxes, up at the side, like they have in New York, watching a play . . . Ah, well . . . Is this your son?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Yes, this is Joseph. He's ten years old.

LINCOLN. What are you going to be, Joseph Jefferson, Junior?

JOSEPH. An actor.

LINCOLN. So you've made up your mind already.

JOSEPH. Sure. I've been an actor for years.

LINCOLN. (*Smiling*) Well done! Nothing like being sure of yourself. I wish I could be half as sure, ma'am.

(LINCOLN goes over to the costume trunk, and idly picks out a king's crown as he speaks.)

MRS. JEFFERSON. (*Laughing*) You'd better join us, Mr. Lincoln.

LINCOLN. That was a very tempting offer you made me.

JEFFERSON. Then why not?

LINCOLN. Do you think this would fit me? (*He puts it on.*) "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!" Eh? Perhaps I could play one of those sad kings for you. (*He takes it off, laughing.*) No. (*He throws the crown back among the costumes.*) I guess I'll have to stay in Springfield.

(McKENZIE calls for JEFFERSON and appears for a moment in the doorway.)

McKENZIE. Jefferson! Hey! All set for a rehearsal, folks! Come along. . . .

JEFFERSON. I'm afraid I have to leave you, Mr. Lincoln. Will you excuse me?

LINCOLN. Sure.

JEFFERSON. Thank you. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you. Good day.

LINCOLN. Good day, Mr. Jefferson. And good luck.

(JEFFERSON goes into the theatre.)

JEFFERSON. (*As he goes*) Coming, my dear?

MRS. JEFFERSON. Thank you, Mr. Lincoln. You've been so kind to us. I wish there was something we could do for you.

LINCOLN. Thank you, ma'am, that's friendly. I know I'm an odd-looking, unfriendly sort of spectacle, but I value friendship most of all.

MRS. JEFFERSON. What was that dream you had, Mr. Lincoln?

LINCOLN. That? . . . No, ma'am, if I was to begin telling my dreams they might lock me up. I'll just say—good-bye, ma'am . . . good-bye!

(*He turns suddenly and goes, shy and awkward.*)

MRS. JEFFERSON. (*To JOSEPH, who is following her into the theatre*) Well, for goodness' sake!

JOSEPH. Why did that man look so sad, mom?

MRS. JEFFERSON. I don't know, Joseph. I don't know. Maybe he's lonely. But he looked kind of good in that crown. Like as though it suited him. Pity he isn't an actor. Come along, Joseph.

(*They go in as the curtain falls.*)



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